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ABSTRACT

Until recently, college faculty members were not required to be proficient except in the specific tools of their disciplines. Now, with the information explosion, faculty members must also be technically skilled at sourcing and securing information, integrating the information into the curriculum, and solving problems through technology. There are many difficulties in finding faculty members with these qualifications. Administrators need to create a support system that can address the problems of the information age. There are numerous faculty recruitment and development models, but a collaborative approach would seem to be the most promising. One such approach is the Westminster model currently used at Westminster College, Pennsylvania. The development of technical skills for faculty is promoted through a Faculty Development Committee and a Faculty Development Officer (FDO). Together they work to encourage scholarship and the improvement of teaching. The FDO serves as a resource for faculty members seeking professional development, technology training, and funding opportunities. (SLD)

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The Dilemma of Recruiting, Rewarding, and Retaining Technically Competent Faculty in Higher Education

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The Dilemma of Recruiting, Rewarding, and Retaining Technically Competent Faculty in Higher Education

As the technological age engulfs education, it is essential that universities secure a role in addressing this paradigm shift. As with other changes, faculty must be recruited, trained and rewarded to not only address the change, but even to lead the change.

In most disciplines, it is relatively easy to recruit and hire faculty that, through training and experience, represent the best example of a professional a particular field has to offer. It is unfortunate that securing and retaining personnel to not only represent the best of a particular subject area, but also possess the needed technology skills, is far more difficult. The reasons are both simple and complex.

Until recent years, individuals were not required to be proficient except in the specific tools of their discipline. Now with the information explosion, faculty must also be technically skilled in sourcing information, skilled in integrating the information in the curriculum, possess the "techno" skills needed to secure the information, and skilled in addressing technophobia and the various learning styles of today's learners.

Educators, cognitive psychologists and technology specialists agree that today's world presents an environment in which learners can explore, communicate and solve problems in new ways via the use of technology. If higher education systems desire faculty to use the technologies of the modern world to support students' active learning

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and problem solving, we will need to prioritize our support by providing time, training and access to the technology. (Means, 1994) This shift in job descriptions requires faculty to be both well versed in their subject area or discipline, and skilled in instructional design, educational technology, communication skills, learning style assessment and a large variety of other areas. Many faculty employed by the institutions of higher learning possess a wealth of talent in subject expertise, teaching methodology, and several other noted areas. Yet, rarely do faculty members have the multiplicity of skills that today's learning climate in higher education requires. Fear of the computer, the idea that technological skills are not necessary to the art of teaching, inadequate time to learn, overwhelming work loads, and resentment at having to learn new instructional methods are salient points most technologically unprepared instructors make when confronted with this new reality.

If administration within higher education is to develop strategies for creating a better balance between the acquisition of technology and faculty usage, administrators must recognize the importance of a technologically literate faculty. (Northrup & Little, 1996) A predominate number of faculty members in higher education were trained before the proliferation of computers exploded in the early 1980's. Because of earlier teacher preparation programs, technology skills were not included as a component of the standard teacher-training repertoire. (Passion, 1998) However, a problem that is even more prevalent than the lack of technological training is that of a negative attitude towards technology use. Faculty members are often uncomfortable and lack confidence in using technology and computers. Many feel threatened by technology and fear losing their role

as possessor and purveyor of knowledge. (Picciano, 1998) Administration must become prepared to deal with attitudinal, training, and access issues.

How then can we address this dilemma? The 'tried and true' solutions come to mind:

1. *Through selective recruitment and hiring;*
2. *Through extensive in-service and staff development;*
3. *Through release time allowed for training.*

But problems exist with these would-be solutions. To begin with, many universities are experiencing major throes of downsizing and cutbacks with positions being eliminated or not being added. The advertised positions are generally positions that fill a gap in the subject or discipline area instead of meeting the technical expertise needed for this information explosion period.

Selective recruitment and hiring

Even when the positions and funds for recruiting quality personnel who potentially possess the complexity of skills required, the salary dollars are often far below the rates these competent individuals could secure in private industry or even in public education arenas outside the university. The most talented individuals are often lured from higher education into business arenas, consulting services, or administrative roles in district offices, community colleges, or even the four-year educational arena. The role these individuals could serve as mentors for undergraduate and graduate students is thus never realized.

Extensive in-service and staff development

The other two would-be solutions are also troubled alternatives in many higher education settings. Faculty loads have increased due to the staff reductions, financial cutbacks, and legislative changes regarding load and contact hours. Time for inservice and staff development are often lost, and no release time is offered for necessary training.

Faculty that would be amenable to learning new skills are instead engaged in study and preparation for the equivalent of four or more courses per semester, increased time in student advisement because of reduction in the number of faculty, more direct involvement in clerical duties due to reduction in support staff, and increased emphasis on research and scholarly work in refereed publications for tenure and promotion.

The newer faculty, recruited with an emphasis in subject area expertise and technical proficiency, offer little hope in this dilemma. As "newer" faculty, these individuals normally:

-are required to handle a heavier course load and/or advisement role;

-are engaged in new courses with heavy start-up or development aspects;

-are assigned to a variety of service responsibilities that the more entrenched faculty have not elected, or are not required to be involved in, for a variety of reasons;

-are expected to attend all meetings when tenured faculty may be excused.

Those faculty members with the subject area expertise and technical competency would be likely candidates for mentoring other faculty in technology, developing initiative offerings, using distance learning formats or technology tools, or training students in state-of-the-art competencies. Unfortunately, this concept is often not

realized. The newer faculty become mired in the production regiment that not only prevents them from any of the above, but further forces these "could-be star mentors" into a non-growth pattern for themselves.

Further Complications

No formulas have been developed to measure the impact of technical skills as it relates to promotion and tenure questions. An incentive system is needed to continue to encourage growth on the part of "new" and "older" faculty. The guide of "x" number of refereed publications in a technology-age does not compute.

Formulas need to be created that encourage faculty to retool and enhance their technical competence regardless of discipline area or time-in-grade. Time to learn needs to be granted. Credit for achievement needs to be given for developments that have an impact in moving a course of study forward in a department or a school. Higher education faculty need to be encouraged to learn and grow, learn and exchange, or coach those newcomers who need mentoring.

Staff development programs must consider providing incentives for faculty to ensure active participation. Intrinsic and extrinsic rewards should be considered for faculty that become substantially involved with the implementation of technology in their teaching role. (Becker, 1994) Many possibilities for providing incentives and administrators can be provided, and administrators must educate themselves to become attuned to those remedies most appropriate for their faculty and institution. Research shows that schools that value more advanced technology develop a culture prone to offering incentives that involve recognition of personal achievement and professional

acknowledgment. (Picciano, 1998) Reward systems should be devised for development of process and products that have campus-wide implications, i.e.:

university-wide strategic plans for distance learning;

training modules for developing on-line courses;

training materials for inservice and staff development of present faculty;

design of software or computer-aided instruction;

innovative use of technology available to market industry and its offerings;

and giving technological assistance and encouragement to those individuals interested in creating personal or course websites.

Release time needs to be granted for:

- Faculty to assume administrative roles or task force roles to address needed support systems for technology;
- Faculty/mentor technology teams to provide on-site, in-office instruction to faculty wishing to become technically competent;
- Faculty to "play" and learn in computer labs, in their own office and even at home with tutorials, new equipment and software;

Faculty to attend training outside their discipline in computer or technology skills with an emphasis on "performing", or offering a presentation while attending the training.

Creative solutions begin at the top

Administration needs to create a support system for higher education which can address the problems encountered in this new world:

-Continued campus-wide inventory of equipment and software needs;

-Onsite and immediate technical advice in the classroom, in the office, and even faculty homes;

-Ongoing training sessions for faculty only;

-Funding for graduate assistants to reduce the load and allow faculty to train and practice;

-Creative business partnerships with start-up technology to reduce the overhead and provide service to the university;

-Site licenses for reduced cost of current software;

-Innovative lease plans for equipment for university use and personal use for faculty and students;

-New delivery systems via telecommunications, teleconferencing, and satellites;

-Encouragement for faculty mentoring system or tech force;

-Continuously updating mission statements that reflect the institution's dedication to becoming a technologically savvy entity;

-Encouraging and offering step-by-step guidance for faculty members who are willing to take the plunge into distance learning;

-Offering funds to cover the cost generated by distance learning instructors who need to be online at home.

While there are currently numerous faculty recruitment and development models, the authors favor a collaborative approach to the problem. One such approach worthy of mention is the "Westminster model", currently being deployed at

Westminster College in Pennsylvania. Westminster ranks in the top 10 in the nation in graduation rate performance, according to U.S. News & World Report, and has achieved success in faculty recruitment and development. Administration made the commitment to develop technology skills in their faculty and to recruit and retain such faculty by establishing a collegewide "Faculty Development Committee", and creating a line for "Faculty Development Officer."

> "The members of the Faculty Development Committee, elected by the college faculty, work to promote scholarship and teaching effectiveness. They run workshops and small group discussions on various topics, process sabbatical leave and released time proposals, produce the Faculty Development newsletter, mentor new faculty, and advise the Faculty Development Officer." [Online] Available: June 14, 2000, http://www.westminster.edu/acad/faculty/index.html?id=207.36.137.107

> At Westminster, the Faculty Development Officer works along with the Academic Dean and the Faculty Development Committee to encourage scholarship and the improvement of teaching. The FDO **serves as a resource for faculty members seeking professional development, technology training and funding opportunities.** The FDO consults with faculty in the preparation of sabbatical proposals and helps faculty find external funding resources. The FDO organizes and hosts the Faculty Forum. The FDO works with the faculty in the implementation of the new Liberal Studies Curriculum, chairing discussions and running workshops.

[Online] Available: June 14, 2000

http://www.westminster.edu/acad/faculty/index.html?id=207.36.137.107

While it is beyond the scope of this article to present numerous models of faculty development, recruitment, and retention, it is worth noting at least one institution of higher learning that has apparent success with fostering technological development for its faculty members.

An adequate support and reward system relays a message to faculty that its administration cares, supports, and values their efforts in remaining current and competent. Recruitment of faculty with higher levels of talents, retaining those who are becoming more technologically skilled, and enticing die-hard technophobes to join the 21st century could finally become a reality when the message of commitment to excellence is demonstrated.

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